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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002521

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: POST-ELECTION POSTURING: ABDULLAH SAYS FRAUD
"WIDESPREAD"

REF: KABUL 2468

Classified By: PolCouns Annie Pforzheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Presidential Candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah told CODEL Casey on August 23 he could no longer "turn his eye" from widespread election irregularities, in particular in the southern provinces. His biggest concern remains polling centers in the south claiming 40-45 percent voter turnout, when "all observers" saw actual turnout at less than 10 percent. He said he "had faith in the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC)," but that the votes from these suspicious voting centers must be quarantined and not announced as part of the election results. He claimed Karzai was behind the fraud. He said he asked his followers to "be patient" until official numbers were announced, noting that it would be irresponsible to call his people to protest in such a fragile country. However, he said if the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) included the fraudulent votes, he was "unsure" what his people would do. End Summary.

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FRAUD "WIDESPREAD"
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12. (C) Abdullah told CODEL Casey on August 23 that he is most concerned about possible ballot stuffing in Kandahar, Ghazni, and Khost provinces, but also noted irregularities in Helmand, Paktya and Paktika. He claimed voter turnout in Kandahar, for example, was less than 10 percent, but some polling results claimed a 40-45 percent voter turnout. He repeated a concern he had voiced earlier (reftel) that his agents were not accredited until the day before the elections, preventing them from traveling in time to remote polling centers, and were "blocked by government officials" from entering six districts in Kandahar. He said a prominent pro-Karzai local commander in Kandahar was responsible, noting that a polling center was located in this commander's house. He claimed that in 46 other cases in Kandahar, polling centers were inappropriately located in someone's home, noting most of the homes belonged to Karzai-supporters.

13. (C) Abdullah stated to the CODEL that he could "not turn his eye away from widespread irregularities." He said if it had been more limited, he would not have made statements to the press. However, he said, in the past day the reports he received from his polling agents and local supporters in the provinces forced him to take a stronger stance. He said in order to save "the process and Afghanistan," any suspicious votes should be quarantined by the ECC, and not counted in the initial voting estimates on August 25. (Note: The 25 August announcement is just the beginning of the IEC rolling count that will produce full provisional results on about 3 September; his point may be to prevent any early claim of Karzai's lead that would later be hard to derogate. End note.) He noted the role of the international community to certify and ensure the correct elections process was followed was fundamental.

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ECC CAPABLE, IEC 'CONTROLLED BY KARZAI'

14. (C) Abdullah said he has faith in the "integrity and capability" of the ECC, in part due to the presence of three international experts on the five-person board. However, he claimed the IEC Chairman Dr. Lodin "worked for Karzai, and everyone knows it." He said his campaign team had filed their complaints with the ECC on August 23, and that he would ask his supporters to be responsible and patient while they wait for the decisions of the electoral institutions. He said calling for protests in such a fragile country would easily spin out of control and could lead to Iran-style protests. However, he noted, if the initial announcements indicated that the fraudulent votes were being counted--and Karzai won with a large margin, i.e., 70 percent of the vote--he was "not sure" how his people would react.

ABDULLAH'S PRESS STATEMENTS

15. (C) Abdullah told the press on August 23 that he was "100% sure" that Karzai ignored Afghan election rules, accusing Karzai of rigging the elections to try to win in a first round. He also claimed Karzai "used the state apparatus" to commit election fraud. Abdullah's deputy campaign manager Saleh Registani told the press that there had been "big fraud" in at least seven provinces where the strong Taliban presence had deterred most voters. He alleged there were "only a handful" of voters in Ghazni, yet 250,000 votes were cast for President Karzai. In Kandahar, he

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claimed 10,000 people were counted voting, while 100,000 votes were supposedly cast. Abdullah also said he is exploring the possibility of a coalition candidacy in the case that the election went into a second round.

16. (U) CODEL Casey cleared on this cable.
EIKENBERRY